

Survey of Natural Resources of the Commune

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To protect the sea one must above all administer the coastal areas in a proper manner.

It is the context of administration of those territories and communes situated within these coastal areas that the NGO can and must play an essential role.

In Provence-Aples Côte d'Azur, the region of France which borders the Mediterranean coastline from the Italian frontier to the mouth of the Rhône, the U. R. V. N. proposes to those communes who so desire, the establishment of a survey of the natural resources of the commune.

In just a few words: what are the objectives of these surveys? How are they constituted?

I - THE OBJECTIVES

The U.R.V.N. furthers four objectives in proposing the establishment of a survey of a natural wealth to be found within a given district or commune.

1° The first is to provide the municipalities with the information which is indispensable in order to fulfil the mission entrusted to them by the French law on administrative decentralisation of January 7, 1983 which is to administer that part of the national patrimony which their territory constitutes and to be the guardian of its integrity. Article 35 of the law on decentralisation specifies «French territory is the common patrimony of the nation. Every local community is its administrative manager and guardian».

In order to administer, one must know what is to be administered, an intuitive or conventional knowledge is not sufficient. One needs an objective and precise knowledge of the different sectors, biotopes and ecosystems, of their wealth and of their functioning.

The survey describes, explains and analyses the different elements which constitute the natural environment of the commune.

2° The second objective is to impress upon all the inhabitant of the commune the interest and the beauty of nature, the harmony of the areas surrounding them and the fragility of certain natural settings which appear so indestructible.

In democracy, public opinion is the only undefeatable force. It alone can impose the protection of the environment as indeed it imposed the preservation of historical monuments in the mid 19th century, which had been hitherto neglected.

This pressure of opinion will be more effective than the regulations which are rarely enforced and which furthermore, are often more harmful when applied than when forgotten.

3° The third objective of the survey is to highlight the sectors of Communal territory to be protected, those areas which due to their place in the hydraulic system, to the wealth of fauna and flora to be found there and to the beauty of the landscape merit being preserved as a nature reserve.

It is necessary to further the idea of constituting a network of natural open spaces, as opposed to parks and gardens and agricultural land, which would be managed in such a way as to ensure that they evolve along their own lines rather than along the lines of man.

A governmental commission set up in France in 1985 to study the problem of natural open spaces came to the same conclusions. This network would have the double advantage of facilitating the autoprurification of both water and air while allowing the population to come into quick easy contact with nature for its own well being.

4° Finally, the fourth objective of the surveys is to demonstrate that there exists another method of protection of nature aside from that of systematically filing oppositions to new construction projects.

The method of opposition which NGOs are unfortunately forced to use as a rule is often ineffective and serves at best to merely obtain delays or modifications of detail.

In order to safeguard nature it is better to prevent than to cure. The survey prefers to take the initiative and highlights sensitive, fragile and rare sectors. It points out sources of untreated pollution. It enables the planning of the development of the commune in full awareness of relevant facts. And most especially, it substitutes a collaboration and understanding for the conflict reigning between the NGO and the local politicians thus leading to a more effective joint action.

The objectives of the survey are obvious but why chose the communities as an area of study when it is blatantly obvious that the problems posed by nature ignore all administrative boundaries.

The answer is simple : in France ever since the law on decentralisation, it is the mayor who «decides» in so far as the organisation of space and its utilisation is concerned. It is he who has the zoning regulations drawn up and he who delivers the construction permits. It is therefore he and his Municipal Council who must be made aware. The problems of nature and of pollution are greater than and their causes and effects spread far wider than the community limits but they must be solved within each administrative boundary by those who have the power to do so.

II - THE CONTENTS OF THE SURVEY

The survey outlines the characteristics of a physical milieu, (geology, hydrology, climatology, pedology) in a synthetic form accessible to all. It must describe and explain the variety of animal and vegetable life and its organisation in interdependent biological systems. It also describes the impact of human occupation just as much through archaeological riches as through the results of recent urbanisation.

The global apprehension of the communal space and the highlighting of the inter-reaction of physical factors, biological realities and social activities requires the collection of varied information.

On one hand specific and specialised studies carried out by the technical public services and universities, innumerable but widely dispersed and often remaining confidential, and on the other local knowledge which gives the observations of and contact with the local population.

The survey is an opportunity to exploit and valorize all the technical studies in existence, to retain the conclusions, translate them into lay terms (no easy task) and to express them graphically on the same scale and propose a useful synthesis.

There are no plans to conduct scientific studies within the framework of the surveys and in the domains where there are shortfalls in information. This would take too much time and competences difficult to congregate. Deficiencies are merely pointed out for a future study by competent bodies.

The survey is a compilation, a translation and a formatting of existing knowledge which must nevertheless indicate the actual situation and point out possible evolutive tendencies.

For this purpose, the surveys make use of aerial photographs published by the National Geographic Institute (NGI) which are the result of photographic missions spaced over decades. One can in this manner follow the evolution of urbanised, cultivated and natural zones.

The photographic data is cross checked with geological maps, the course of the waterways, both superficial and subterranean and all information relative to different cultures, fauna and wild flora.

In this manner, we are able to divide the communal territory into homogenous sectors which it is possible to characterise and appreciate in terms of its ecological value. A system known as the Lucas Method is used to do this.

It enables the anotation of sectors from 1-9 in accordance with the rarity, the interest and fragility of the elements to be found there, along the lines of 4 categories; geological, botanical, zoological and landscape.

One completed the survey comprises :

A synthetic report of about 100 pages with tables of chronological series, ratios allowing for inter-communal comparison along with objective conclusions which avoid taking sides in any problems arising from a political decision.

A bibliographical annexe making reference to all studies utilised, existing references in the computerised centre «Ecothek» along with a list of particularly interesting floral and fauna species.

A set of maps and transparencies of 1/25 scale and a chart highlighting distinct points.

A set of slides illustrating the rare or particularly beautiful species and some landscapes which make up the charm of the commune. These slides can be accompanied by a tape recorded commentary (this option is generally utilised).

Over the last three years, the U.R.V.N. has carried out about 20 surveys in the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region, some in big towns such as Cannes and Fréjus, some in famous holiday towns, notably St Tropez and Cassis as well as in some traditional villages such as Vauvenargues, Gordes and Bouc-Bel-Air.

As a rule, these surveys are financed by the commune which requests them. During the first two years, the State and the Region had granted subsidies. The U.R.V.N. has also had to make appeals to large businesses in the area in order to continue its action. The «Caisse des Dépôts et Consignation, La Caisse d'Aide à l'Equipement des Collectivités, la Compagnie Lyonnaise des Eaux, Electricité de France and IBM» are all aware of the interest of this method of collaboration between the NGO and the public organisations.

Furthermore, these studies have the advantage of creating employment for students at the end of their studies. For each survey undertaken, we recruit 3-4 students who are remunerated and who can in this way utilise their newly acquired knowledge.

This example of action which I have outlined to you may seem like a small detail in the face of the huge problems raised by the question of the protection of the enclosed coastal sea but, let there be no mistake - the protection of the sea implies a protection of the shores and of the areas constituting the basin of the waterways feeding the sea.

The conservation of nature on such a vast scale can only be accomplished if it is assumed by the responsible authorities with the aid of the concerned population.

If we are able to convince each local community to draw up a survey of the wealth it has under its guardianship, and thus administer it, it is certain that we would take a great step towards solving the problem which we are all seeking to resolve.